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SUBJECT: BENIN: UPDATE ON GOB EFFORTS TO COMBAT CHILD TRAFFICKING

REF: COTONOU 181

11. (U) SUMMARY: Benin has made some progress in the past several months in the fight against child trafficking. The Ministry of Family, Women and Children's National Child Protection Coordination and Monitoring Working Group embarked on the planning of its 2008 activities and the approval of the two main policy documents that will spearhead the GOB's child protection efforts. The GOB is ready to issue the enabling decrees required for the enforcement of the 2006 Anti-Child Trafficking Act. In another development the EU provided support to the Ministry of Family to help increase the fight against child trafficking. Meanwhile, Benin and Nigeria are working together to rescue Beninese minors exploited in Nigerian stone quarries. END SUMMARY

WORKING GROUP ACTION PLANS

12. (U) The National Child Protection Coordination and Monitoring Working Group, which functions as a Child Protection Task Force, is composed of four main committees: the Committee on Traffic and Exploitation, the Committee on Juvenile Justice, the Committee on Violence and Harmful Practices and the Committee on Orphans and Vulnerable Children. Each committee presented its 2008 action plans. The plans focus on public awareness campaigns, training and data collection. The Committees have been instructed to target primarily monitoring and coordination measures in order to be in line with the tasks assigned to the Working Group. The Working Group is now considering ways to set up chapters at lower levels throughout Benin to improve the monitoring of the anti-trafficking outreach effort.

ANTI-CHILD TRAFFICKING LAW READY FOR ENFORCEMENT

13. (U) The three amended implementing decrees for Act No. 2006-04 Relating to the Displacement of Minors and the Suppression of Child Trafficking, passed by the National Assembly in January 2006 and signed by President Yayi in April 2006, obtained all required clearances and now are to be introduced to the Council of Ministers for final approval.

EU PROVIDES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO MINISTRY OF FAMILY

14. (U) On October 23, 2007, the EU launched a Cooperation and Technical Assistance Bureau (BCAT) consisting of 4 locally recruited resource persons and headed by a Belgian expert. The EU and GOB tasked the BCAT to provide the Ministry of Family, Women and

Children with technical assistance in the area of child protection. This body will implement a 4-year action plan. The objectives of the BCAT include: strengthen the institutional capacity of the Family Ministry, coordinate EU funded projects regarding child protection, coordinate other actors involved in the fight against child trafficking, and assess the GOB's progress in fighting child trafficking.

NATIONAL PLAN TO COMBAT CHILD TRAFFICKING AND LABOR

15. (U) The National Plan to Combat Child Trafficking and Labor, funded by ILO/IPEC (International Labor Organization/International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor), was approved on September 28, 2007. The document focuses specifically on the eradication of child labor and trafficking in Benin.

2008-2012 NATIONAL POLICY FOR CHILD PROTECTION

16. (U) The GOB completed drafting and editing of the UNICEF sponsored National Policy and Strategy for Child Protection. On November 6-7, representatives from the donors' community, international organizations and local anti-trafficking NGOs gathered in a session to review and approve the document. This 149 page document centers on 7 principles intended to provide coherence, focus and direction to all the activities undertaken by the Government of Benin regarding the prevention, the rehabilitation and the reintegration of vulnerable children.

GOB MAKES PREPARATIONS TO CELEBRATE BENINESE CHILD DAY

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17. (U) This year the Ministry of Family, Women and Children is preparing to commemorate the Beninese Child Day on December 23, 2007 in Athieme, a border village with Togo, which functions as an entry and transit point for children trafficked to and from Togo. The event will focus on public awareness campaigns with the local communities and on publicizing the anti-child trafficking law.

GOVERNMENTS OF BENIN AND NIGERIA LAUNCH SYNCHRONIZED PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS ALONG THEIR BORDER

18. (U) As part of the action plan of the joint Benin-Nigeria Committee on child trafficking, Beninese and Nigerian officials jointly conducted a campaign against child-trafficking between the two countries from August 12 through August 17. Nigeria's National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Benin's Family Ministry, and UNICEF worked together on the campaign. The campaign covered six villages along the Benin - Nigeria border and targeted Beninese and Nigerian law enforcement agents and local communities. In spite of the logistic difficulties that the team faced in the field, the campaign was successful.

TERRE DES HOMMES ENGAGES IN REPATRIATION OF CHILDREN

19. (U) On July 27, Terre des Hommes, a Swiss NGO based in Cotonou, signed a two-year cooperation agreement with the Association of Beninese living in Nigeria's Ogun state to repatriate and reintegrate children exploited in the quarries of Abeokuta, Ogun state, and to improve their living conditions by providing them with vocational training, health services and food. On August 27, Terre des Hommes proposed a draft Memorandum of Understanding to the Nigerian National Agency for the prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP) for the process of identification, rescue and transport of the children trafficked in the Abeokuta stone quarries. The two agreements result from a prevention strategy designed by the

two countries to stop the trafficking of children from Zakpota (a region in central Benin) to Abeokuta's stone quarries. Benin's Ministry of Family, Women and Children stated it was not adequately involved in the decision making surrounding this agreement and intends to bring it up at its next meeting with its Nigerian counterparts.

10.(SBU) COMMENT: Terre des Hommes is the leading international organization which provides shelter for victims of trafficking in Benin. The fact that it is taking the lead in the rescue and reintegration of trafficked children in Nigeria is perceived by the Ministry of Family, Women and Children officials as an attempt to take up one of their major responsibilities with the effect of shadowing their own efforts. While the GOB may be indignant, it remains heavily dependent on Terre des Hommes' shelters to provide adequate care to Benin's trafficked children. END COMMENT

11.(U) Nyree Triptree at AmEmbassy Abuja cleared on paragraphs 8, 9, and 10 of this cable.

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